



Review

Bureaucracy, influence and beliefs: A literature review of the factors shaping the role of a safety professional



David J. Provan*, Sidney W.A. Dekker, Andrew J. Rae

Griffith University, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 17 January 2017

Received in revised form 10 May 2017

Accepted 13 June 2017

Keywords:

Safety professional

Safety

Institutional work

Professional practice

ABSTRACT

Safety professionals have been working within organizations since the early 1900s. During the past 25 years, societal pressure and political intervention concerning the management of safety risks in organizations has driven dramatic change in safety professional practice. What are the factors that influence the role of safety professionals? This paper reviews more than 100 publications. Thematic analysis identified 25 factors in three categories: institutional, relational, and individual. The review highlights a dearth of empirical research into the practice and role of safety professionals, which may result in some ineffectiveness. Practical implications and an empirical research agenda regarding safety professional practice are proposed.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Contents

1. Introduction	99
2. Institutional factors	100
2.1. Safety profession	100
2.2. Regulation	100
2.3. Performance measurement	101
2.4. Safety bureaucracy	101
2.5. Safety culture	101
2.6. Safety structure	101
3. Relational factors	102
3.1. Challenge	103
3.1.1. Speaking up	103
3.1.2. Whistle blowing	104
3.1.3. Constructive enquiry	104
3.2. Alliance	104
3.2.1. Line managers	104
3.2.2. Front-line workforce	105
3.2.3. Business processes	105
3.3. Authority	105
3.3.1. Senior management	106
3.3.2. Safety systems	106
3.3.3. Decision rights	106
3.3.4. Limitations of authority	106
3.4. Influence	106
3.4.1. Relationships	107
3.4.2. Interpersonal skills	107
3.4.3. Organisational context	108

* Corresponding author at: School of Humanities, Griffith University, 170 Kessels Road, QLD 4111, Australia.

E-mail address: david.provan@griffithuni.edu.au (D.J. Provan).

4. Individual factors 108
 4.1. Safety beliefs 108
 4.2. Domain safety knowledge 109
 4.3. Knowledge worker skills 109
 4.4. Risk understanding 109
 5. Conclusion 109
 5.1. Practical implications 109
 5.2. Further research 110
 References 110

1. Introduction

Since Hale’s (1995) reflections on the role of safety professionals in this journal, the safety profession has grown in size, has spread across ever more industries, and has become increasingly bureaucratized on the back of ballooning regulations, organizational processes and a separation or professionalization of the safety role (Townsend, 2013; Dekker, 2014; Pryor et al., 2015; Righi et al., 2015). In the present review, we identify, collate and assess the past 25 years’ worth literature on the practice of safety professionals. Consistent with Hale’s original intentions, ‘safety professional’ is used for roles whose primary purpose is to provide safety advice which may focus on specific hazards (e.g. process, transportation, ergonomics, industrial hygiene), or constitute a generalist safety role to coordinate advice and support (e.g. safety management systems, culture, contractor management, emergency response).

The job design, title, objective and ‘mission statement of safety professionals varies widely across industries and within organizations. Brun and Loisel (2002) found more than 100 different titles. Hill (2006) identified no common definition of practice or common terminology to explain what safety professionals do. Even line managers may not understand, nor does the general population (Lawrence, 2008; Ferguson and Ramsay, 2010). The job might involve hazard recognition, evaluation and control (Ferguson and Ramsay, 2010), improving working conditions and compliance (Walters, 1999), ensuring good personal safety decisions (Leemann, 2014), developing safety culture and reducing injuries (Johnson, 2014), influencing managers to improve safety (Borys, 2000), preventing injuries and fatalities (Manuele, 2016), monitoring the organisation’s resilience (Woods, 2006) and building safety awareness and infrastructure (Blewett and Shaw, 1996). Given these disparate objectives of safety professional roles within organizations, having a common understanding and evaluation of

safety professional effectiveness remains elusive for both organizations and individuals themselves.

The limited research that has been conducted on safety professionals since Hale (1995) is dominated by studies concerning tasks and education (e.g. Nedved and Booth, 1982; Dejoy, 1991; Brun and Loisel, 2002; Blair, 2004; Hale et al., 2005; Hale and Guldenmund, 2006; Wu, 2011; Chang et al., 2012). However, within the last five years, some researchers have begun exploring the practice of safety professionals from an organizational and social perspective through the use of ethnographic research methods (e.g. Olsen, 2012; Daudigeos, 2013; Pryor, 2014; Reiman and Pietikainen, 2014). Whereas these studies offer some insights into the variability and complexity of safety work, they provide no consistency in their reflections on, and possible critique of, the expectations and actualities of the role of safety professionals in organizations today.

The present review aims to; synthesize the existing disparate literature on Safety Professionals within organizations, provide practical implications for safety professionals and organizations, and contribute a set of specific questions that the literature raises, but requires further empirical investigation to answer. A comprehensive literature search was undertaken using Science Direct and EBSCOhost as the host databases. Keyword searches used combinations of common terms, for example: ‘safety manager,’ ‘safety practitioner,’ ‘safety professional,’ ‘safety officer,’ ‘safety advisor,’ ‘OHS Manager.’ Google Scholar was used to identify additional cross-discipline literature. Citations and references were then used to probe related publications. The literature review identified approximately 100 publications that contributed commentary, theory and, or empirical research concerning the practice of safety professionals. A thematic analysis was conducted through a social theory lens as organizations are primarily complex human systems. A cognitive map was used to organize these topics into twenty-five factors, eight themes and three categories that relate

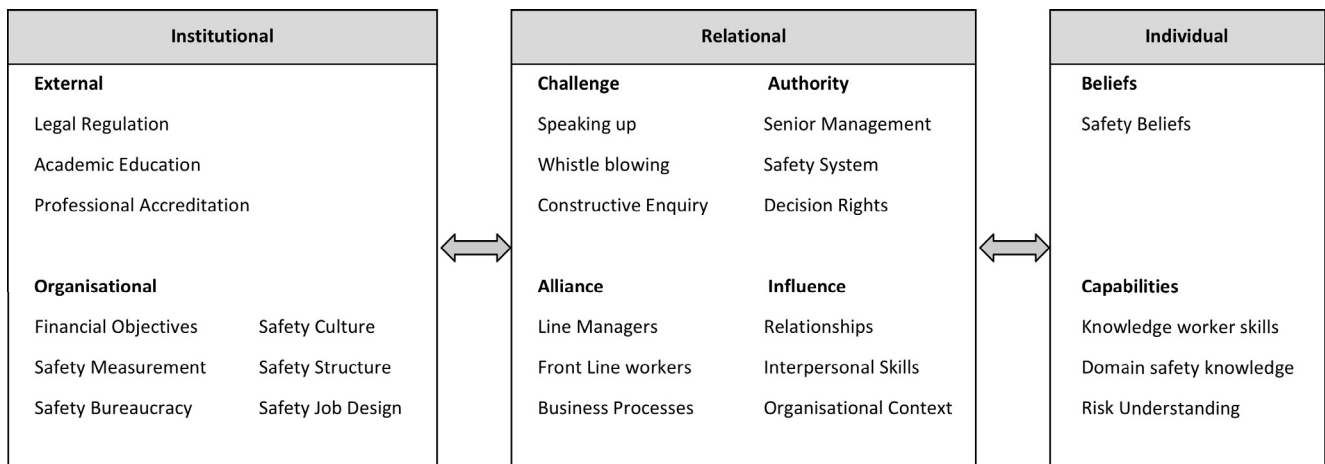


Fig. 1. Institutional, relational and individual factors shaping the practice of a safety professional.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4981213>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4981213>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)